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Report of the mission of the Peacebuilding Commission to Sierra Leone, 8 to 12 March 2010

I. Background

1. A delegation of the Sierra Leone configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission visited Sierra Leone from 8 to 12 March 2010. The delegation was composed of:

(a) Mr. John McNee, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations and Chair of the configuration;

(b) Mr. Martin Palous, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations;

(c) Mr. Park In-kook, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations;

(d) Ms. Marjon V. Kamara, Permanent Representative of Liberia to the United Nations;

(e) Mr. Gonzalo Gutiérrez Reinel, Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations;

(f) Mr. Sulay-Manah Kpukumu, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations.

2. The delegation assessed the situation in Sierra Leone first-hand and consulted widely with national and international partners on a range of peacebuilding issues, including:

(a) The engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission in Sierra Leone, progress on peace consolidation and remaining risk factors;

(b) The state of existing commitments by development partners and ways and means of mobilizing timely technical and financial support for the Agenda for Change and the United Nations Joint Vision for Sierra Leone;

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(c) The future contribution of the Peacebuilding Commission in the key priority areas identified in the outcome of the High-Level Special Session of the Peacebuilding Commission on Sierra Leone, held on 10 June 2009, namely: youth employment and empowerment; drug trafficking and transnational crime; and good governance and the rule of law.

3. During the course of the mission the delegation met with: the President of Sierra Leone, Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma; the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Vandi C. Minah; the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports, Mr. Minkailu Bah; representatives of the Ministries of Employment and Social Services, Trade and Industry; Commissioner Abdul Tejan-Cole of the Anti-Corruption Commission; members of the Joint Drugs Interdiction Task Force, the National Human Rights Commission and the National Electoral Commission; the Registrar of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Mrs. Binta Mansaray; the leaders of the three main political parties; the Chair and members of the Independent Media Commission; representatives of the press, the diplomatic corps, the donor community and civil society; staff of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) and the United Nations country team; and youth.

4. The delegation undertook a one day field visit to Kenema in the Eastern Province where it met with Mr. William Juana Smith, Resident Minister for the Eastern Province, the Mayor of Kenema and a number of local officials, political leaders, and paramount chiefs. It also undertook visits to local projects, including several with a particular focus on youth employment and empowerment.

5. The delegation expressed appreciation to the Government of Sierra Leone and UNIPSIL for their extensive support and assistance.

II. Observations

6. While the delegation noted the recent progress that Sierra Leone has made on a variety of peacebuilding issues, including political reconciliation, good governance, anti-corruption and combating drug trafficking, it shared the concerns of many interlocutors that significant risks to peace and security persist. The grave problem of youth unemployment requires special attention given the latent potential it poses for instability. The delegation agreed on the necessity for the international community to remain engaged with the country in order to fully consolidate the peacebuilding process and lay the foundations for sustainable long-term development.

7. The delegation observed that the political situation remains stable but fragile. Although important progress has been made in follow-up to the joint communiqué signed by the political parties on 2 April 2009, especially with youth and in the rural areas, more needs to be done to address the factors that sparked political violence in March 2009. In particular, inter-party dialogue remains limited and there is little mutual trust. A constructive and viable opposition within the political system in Sierra Leone needs to be further nurtured. Efforts to further entrench a tolerant, inclusive and effective multi-party system, with the full participation of women and youth, will become especially important in the lead up to the 2012 elections. International cooperation is seen as particularly crucial in this area.

8. The Presidential, parliamentary and local elections scheduled for 2012 represent a key political moment for the future of Sierra Leone. All interlocutors underscored the potential risks to peace and security associated with the elections. The delegation wishes, at this juncture, to draw the attention of the Peacebuilding Commission, and that of the entire international community, to this key point and to urge that appropriate assistance and resources be devoted to timely preparations for the election.

9. The economic outlook remains moderately positive with growth rates expected to exceed 5 per cent over the next few years. However, given the population growth rate and the heavy dependence of Sierra Leone on foreign aid, the anticipated levels of growth will be insufficient to lift most of the population out of poverty.

Youth unemployment

10. Youth unemployment is widely recognized as a core peacebuilding challenge that is deeply entwined with the political dynamics in the country. Efforts to address the issue are gaining momentum, but greater strategic clarity and enhanced coordination are needed. This is an area where concerted support from the international community, including the Peacebuilding Commission, appears vital.

11. The delegation met with members of the youth employment sector working group chaired by Mr. Minkailu Bah, Minister of Education, Youth and Sports. The delegation took note of ongoing efforts to rebalance youth employment initiatives in order to create additional demand for jobs and better match the supply of education, skills and vocational training with available opportunities. The Government of Sierra Leone is also in the process of establishing a national youth commission to serve as a focal point of national and international initiatives in this area.

12. The delegation welcomed growing efforts to address youth employment and empowerment. The Government of Sierra Leone has set a target of creating 100,000 additional jobs for youth on an annual basis. Such an ambitious target will require an accurate analysis of current and potential labour demand along with increase in foreign direct investment and international assistance beyond current levels.

13. In addition, the delegation had several opportunities to listen directly to the concerns and experience of youth from a variety of backgrounds. The delegation was struck by the sense of disenfranchisement felt by many and noted the low level of organization and coordination among the many youth groups.

14. The delegation was able to witness first-hand in Kenema the important empowering effect that having a job, however precarious, has on youth. The delegation either observed or was briefed on a number of activities aimed at training or creating viable jobs for youth that have appeared ripe for scaling up. In particular, a GTZ project to reintegrate youth into their rural communities holds great promise. The delegation believes that the international community should pay special attention to and provide adequate resources for these types of initiatives.

Governance

15. The delegation noted the important steps taken by the Government in the fight against corruption. President Koroma has taken a strong stance on the issue and several Ministers have either been suspended or relieved of their responsibilities in the past year. While the Anti-Corruption Commission continues to use its

independence and authority to prosecute the worst offenders, sensitize the public and enhance Government systems, corruption is still pervasive in Sierra Leone and serious challenges remain.

16. Several interlocutors pointed to the need to strengthen and appropriately resource the national police force ahead of the 2012 elections. Efforts also need to be made to dispel any perception of bias and to improve the relationship between the Sierra Leone police and the military. The delegation noted the need for additional equipment in order to respond rapidly to public disturbances and the particularly urgent requirement for transport. In this context, the Sierra Leone configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission has issued an appeal for in-kind contributions of vehicles suitable for police use both in and outside Freetown.

17. The delegation met with the National Human Rights Commission and was briefed on the functioning of the country's human rights machinery. It took particular note of the need to continue following up on the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The issue of reparations to war victims, with special attention to amputees, is a priority.

18. Outstanding matters pertaining to the Special Court for Sierra Leone, and in particular the Charles Taylor trial, were mentioned by several interlocutors as potential triggers of instability. The delegation was also briefed on both the residual and legacy issues associated with the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

19. The field trip to Kenema illustrated the importance of undertaking speedy and effective decentralization. Extending the peace dividend outside Freetown would bring both political and economic benefits to the country. This is especially important given the strong regional affiliations in the country and the tendency for political instability to arise first in rural areas. Enhancing governance and public services outside Freetown is also an essential component of efforts to improve youth employment and enhance agricultural productivity. The field visit also offered the delegation an opportunity to see efforts of the United Nations country team to "deliver as one" on the ground.

20. The establishment of the independent Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation, among the first of its kind in Africa, was praised by the delegation. The delegation also welcomed President Koroma's important gesture in appointing a member of the opposition to lead the Corporation. Once operational, it is essential that the Corporation meet the high expectations of the population regarding its independence and impartiality. The delegation also had an opportunity to meet with representatives from the media and to emphasize, in particular, the special role and responsibility of the media in peacebuilding.

Drug Trafficking

21. The delegation was impressed by the work that Sierra Leone, with the support of the international community, has been undertaking to combat drug trafficking, and recommended investment in resources to fight money-laundering. The integrated approach adopted by the Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force is a model for the region. Although Sierra Leone's organized and effective response appears to have succeeded in disrupting the transit of cocaine from Latin America through Sierra Leone to European markets, the challenge nonetheless remains daunting, and Sierra Leone will continue to require additional resources and technical assistance.

Such support would also play an important preventative role. Domestic production of marijuana is rising, raising the prospect of increased socio-economic harm within the country and growing smuggling within the subregion.

22. The delegation underscored the need for concerted regional action. The delegation was briefed on existing regional initiatives as well as international cooperation with countries of origin and destination and was informed that Sierra Leone's limited ability to monitor its maritime borders remains a significant weakness in this regard. As previously highlighted in an appeal from the Sierra Leone configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, the in kind contribution of a coastal patrol vessel would be a tremendous benefit.

Status of women

23. The delegation was particularly concerned by the status of women and girls in Sierra Leone. Levels of sexual and gender-based violence and female genital mutilation are unacceptably high. The importance of addressing these issues urgently is highlighted by the upcoming anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. In this context, the delegation welcomed the presentation made by Sierra Leone to the Commission on the Status of Women on 3 March 2010, at which it launched its national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). It encouraged the Government and all other national and international stakeholders to continue addressing issues of the advancement and empowerment, including the political empowerment, of women. The delegation felt that it was very important to strengthen support to women, including through the provision of psychological assistance and the creation of shelters to protect women victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

III. Conclusions

24. Sierra Leone has made tremendous progress since the end of the civil war, and it serves as a successful example of multilateral peacebuilding. At the same time, the delegation noted that several significant challenges remain to be addressed before Sierra Leone embarks fully on long-term sustainable development. Continued international support is necessary to overcome these final obstacles.

25. The Agenda for Change and United Nations Joint Vision for Sierra Leone have created a comprehensive and integrated overarching strategy for peace consolidation and economic development. International partners are working in close alignment with a clear set of core priorities. In this respect, the outcome of the High-Level Special Session of the Peacebuilding Commission on Sierra Leone in June 2009 remains an accurate and valuable guide for its future engagement.

26. The Government of Sierra Leone expressed its gratitude for the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission and articulated potential areas of future support. The Peacebuilding Commission should:

(a) Continue to focus attention on Sierra Leone as it consolidates sustainable peace;

(b) Serve as an advocate with the international community, particularly regarding issue areas or forums in which Sierra Leone has limited capacity;

(c) Assist Sierra Leone in being more creative in addressing its challenges, including by reviewing and sharing best practices and lessons learned from similar contexts;

(d) Help to mobilize the required resources to implement the Agenda for Change.

27. The first major review of progress on peacebuilding efforts in Sierra Leone following the 2009 High-Level Special Session on Sierra Leone was held on June 2010. In the spirit of mutual accountability both the Government of Sierra Leone and the international community reviewed the implementation of the Agenda for Change on the basis of their respective responsibilities and commitments.

28. Full implementation of the Agenda for Change will require continued commitment from both national and international actors. Nevertheless, no amount of political commitment will suffice unless the funding gap to implement the Agenda for Change is filled. International partners committed themselves to maintaining current levels of international assistance at the Consultative Group meeting held in London in November 2009. The Sierra Leone configuration will have to recommit itself to marshalling resources for Sierra Leone, in part by devising more creative and innovative ways to broaden the donor base.

29. The delegation was pleased with the degree of integration of the United Nations family on the ground under the capable leadership of the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General. The United Nations presence in Sierra Leone agreed on a Joint Vision which is fully aligned with the Agenda for Change. This represents a model that deserves continued support, including with respect to financial assistance. The delegation wishes to emphasize the importance of funding the United Nations multi-donor trust fund for Sierra Leone to enable the United Nations family to implement the Joint Vision.

30. The delegation wishes to thank the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations family in Sierra Leone for providing a clear vision of the important future role and contribution of the Peacebuilding Commission.